Introduction

- Long distance relationships (LDRs), are a growing phenomenon, especially in the college student population (Aylor, 2003).
- The adult attachment theory states that physical proximity is vital to maintaining attachment security in a romantic relationship (Bowlby, 1979).
- However, LDRs have been found to be more stable than geographically close relationships (GCRs) in college students (Stafford, 2005).
- Adult attachment styles play a role in relationship maintenance behaviors, specifically conflict resolution strategies (Shi, 2003).
- Secure: more likely to use mutually-focused conflict resolution strategies (e.g. integrating).
- Insecure: more likely to use obliging, dominating or avoiding conflict resolution strategies.
- Research has shown that long distance romantic partners try to accentuate positive affect and minimize differences in their daily communication (Stafford, 2005).
- Investigation of the usage of different conflict resolution strategies and their relation to attachment security in LDRs versus GCRs will shed light upon relationship maintenance factors that may be impacting LDRs differently from GCRs.

Research Questions

1. Is there a difference in the usage of conflict avoidance as a conflict resolution strategy in LDRs when compared to GCRs?  
   Hypothesis 1: conflict avoidance in LDRs > conflict avoidance in GCRs  
2. What role, if any, does attachment security play in the usage of conflict avoidance strategies in LDRs when compared to GCRs?  
   Hypothesis 2: LDRs: greater use of conflict avoidance irrespective of attachment security.  
   GCRs: Greater use of conflict avoidance in insecure than secure attachment.

Measures

- Relationship History Questionnaire included questions on relationship type, duration of relationship, frequency of interaction, proximity to partner and symbolic presence of partner.
- Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II) by Rahim (1983) was used to measure conflict resolution behavior in romantic relationships. The Cronbach alpha was .79.
- Conflict Avoidance Scale (CAS) by Stafford (2010) was administered to better capture conflict-avoidant communication. The Cronbach alpha was .55.
- Experiences in Close Relationships Inventory by Brennan, Clark, & Shaver (1998) measures two underlying dimensions of adult attachment: attachment-related avoidance (discomfort with closeness and depending on others) and attachment related anxiety (fear of rejection and abandonment). The Cronbach was found to be .83.
- Idealistic Distortion Scale is a 14-item measure, which is a part of a larger relationship inventory called PREPARE (Fournier, Olson & Druckman, 1983). IDS measures the relationship quality and positive bias of an individual towards their partner. The Chronbach alpha was .92.

Participants

- Eligibility: Past or present involvement in a serious romantic relationship  
  - exclusive relationship  
  - minimum duration of 3 months  
- 94 participants recruited from Psychology Department Participant Pool.  
- Age range: 18 – 25  
  - 10% Male, 90% Female  
  - 95% Heterosexual  
  - 63% current; 37% past partner  
  - 60% LDR: 40% GCR  
- Mean relationship duration:  
  - LDR: 18 months  
  - GCR: 16 months

Results

- Descriptive analyses:  
  - Secure Attachment: 29% LDR: 21% GCR  
  - Insecure Attachment: 71% LDR: 79% GCR  
- Secure attachment was correlated with lower conflict avoidance, and vice versa.  
- Hypothesis 1:  
  - ROCI-II: A chi square contingency showed a statistically significant relationship between relationship type (LDR, GCR) and conflict avoidance (high, low), $X^2 = 5.509, p<0.05$ with higher conflict avoidance in GCR couples.  
  - CAS: Similar pattern of higher conflict avoidance in GCR than LDR couples.  
- Hypothesis 2:  
  - CAS: ANOVAs showed a statistically significant trend of the interaction between relationship type and attachment security, $F(1,1) = 1.087, p<.10$. Secure LDRs showed lower levels of conflict avoidance than insecure LDRs, secure, and insecure GCRs.  
  - ROCI-II: Similar pattern, with lowest conflict avoidance in secure LDRs.

Conclusions

- The first hypothesis aimed to replicate Stafford’s (2005) findings. However, the results show significant effects in the opposite direction, with GCRs displaying higher conflict avoidance than LDRs.  
- Similarly, the results for the second research question was opposite that hypothesized, with persons in secure GCRs displaying high levels of conflict avoidance irrespective of attachment style, and persons in secure LDRs displaying the lowest levels of conflict avoidance.  
- These results are supported by the adult attachment theory.  
  - GCRs: physical proximity may be a protective factor, and nullify differences between secure and insecure groups.  
  - LDRs: lack physical proximity and so insecure attachment may exacerbate conflict avoidance, while secure attachment may be indicative of usage of positive conflict resolution strategies.  
- The findings suggest potential similarities and differences between LDRs and GCRs.  
- Future studies should examine other unique relationship management techniques in LDRs.